

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD  
SOUTH DAKOTA SUPPLEMENTS ITALICIZED**

**RECREATION AREA IMPROVEMENT**

(ac.)  
**CODE 562**

**DEFINITION**

Establishing grasses, legumes, vines, shrubs, trees, or other plants or selectively reducing stand density and trimming woody plants to improve an area for recreation.

**PURPOSE**

To increase the attractiveness and usefulness of recreation areas and to protect the soil and plant resources.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On any area planned for recreation use.

**CRITERIA**

***Criteria for Recreation Area Planting***

*Recreation area plantings are special purpose plantings subject to varying degrees of trampling, mowing, vehicle use, or wildlife use. Species selected for planting must be chosen to fit the soil and climatic conditions and the kind of use that is planned. Planting specifications will be developed after an onsite inspection.*

*Grasses and forbs will be established following guidance on species adaption, seedbed preparation, seeding dates, methods of seeding, and protection until established as included in conservation practices Pasture and Hayland Planting (512), Range Planting (550), Critical Area Planting (342), and Conservation Cover (327).*

*To select suitable species of trees and shrubs refer to the Windbreak Suitability Groups in Section II-N and conservation practice Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380) in Section IV-A of the South Dakota Technical Guide.*

*Plant trees five to six feet high to reduce the chance that they will be cut by mowers or otherwise damaged or destroyed. Supplemental watering is required for establishing trees and shrubs that are larger than the sizes recommended in Table 4 of Practice 380. Practice code 441 provides information on drip irrigation systems.*

***Criteria for Recreation Area Thinning and Pruning***

***General.*** Remove debris from the area.

*As a safety precaution where wildfire is a hazard, remove dead and down material 100 to 150 feet outside of the intensively used area.*

*Guidelines for pruning and thinning for the purpose of creating vistas can be obtained by contacting the state office.*

***Improvement by Thinning.*** In mixed stands of trees and shrubs, favor the most desirable long lived species, such as oak, ash, and hackberry.

*Remove defective, damaged, infested, or poorly formed trees and trees that may be a safety hazard.*

*Cut trees to provide good access and optimum shade for the specific kind of recreation; e.g., picnic tables, camping areas, playgrounds, etc. Thin lightly to improve scenic views when needed and remove enough shrubs for air circulation.*

*Leave trees and shrubs in irregularly spaced clumps, where possible. Make openings that appear to be natural.*

*Avoid damage to remaining trees and shrubs when removing unwanted vegetation. Cut tree stumps to ground level and grub out unwanted shrubs and vines.*

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically and updated if needed. The current version of this standard is posted on our website at [www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov) or may be obtained at your local Natural Resources Conservation Service.

*Protect selected trees and shrubs from damage by livestock, wildlife, traffic, insects, disease, wildfire, human activity, etc.*

**Improvement by Pruning.** *Remove dead and diseased branches from trees and shrubs. Maintain annually.*

*Prune lower tree branches to 8 to 12 feet in height to facilitate safe movement of people, vehicles, etc. This may require annual maintenance.*

*Prune trees and shrubs to improve their appearance and usefulness. Avoid "hedge" trimming shrubs. Leave trees and shrubs in as natural a condition as possible.*

*Prune trees and shrubs as needed according to conservation practice Tree/Shrub Pruning (660A).*

*The best time for pruning is early spring while woody plants are still dormant, but additional shaping can be done when the plants are in full leaf.*

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

*Consider using species that require minimal maintenance. An example is use of buffalo grass for lawns, to reduce the frequency of mowing and watering.*

*Native species should be encouraged to the extent possible.*

*Avoid use of non-native species that are invasive in native habitats.*

*Consider the effects on the water budget, especially on volumes and rates of runoff, infiltration, and transpiration.*

*Consider the effects of erosion and the movement of sediment, pathogens, and soluble and sediment-attached substances that could be carried by runoff. Important factors are short-term changes caused by construction (sediments, fuels, oils, and other chemicals) compared to long-term changes caused by the same substances resulting from recreation activities.*

*Consider the effects of changes in ground water from infiltrating soluble substances associated with vegetation management and recreation activities.*

## **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

*Plans and specifications will be according to this standard. Specifications will be prepared for each site and will be recorded in a conservation plan describing details adequately to achieve the intended purpose.*